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AUTHOR Hirtz, Nicholas J.
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ABSTRACT

A timely and coordinated system to conduct placement and followup studies was developed by Hillsborough Community College. The project was intended to increase the response rate of program completers and leavers and the placement rate of program completers in order to meet the placement rate set by the 1983 Florida legislation. Vocational faculty and administrators cooperated by completing a placement survey questionnaire and a referral form for completers requiring job placement assistance. Job placement specialists contributed to the documentation of placement in a similar manner, and completers requiring job placement assistance were referred to them. A survey questionnaire was mailed to all program completers and leavers to collect placement data. Second and third mailings to non-respondents followed. The Feedback Tape from the Florida Division of Labor and Employment Security provided additional information matching program completers with students in the state university system and employees as reported by employers. An overall response rate of 95.6 percent of all vocational program completers demonstrated the effectiveness of other sources of placement documentation in addition to the survey alone. The response rate of program leavers increased by more than 100 percent. The placement rate was considerably higher than for two previous years. (YLB)

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Final Report

Project No. 2921525-2E21

From September 1, 1984 to August 31, 1985

# The Development and Coordination of Placement and Follow-Up for Vocational Guidance

Hillsborough Community College
39 Columbia Avenue
P. O. Box 22127
Tampa, FL 33630

Nicholas J. Hirtz

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## Table of Contents


| | |
|---|---|
| Abstract | ii |
| Introduction | 1 |
| History | 1 |
| The Problem | 1 |
| The Project | 1 |
| Objectives | 2 |
| Methodology | 2 |
| Faculty | 2 |
| Job Placement Specialists | 3 |
| Survey | 3 |
| Feedback Tape | 3 |
| Special Activities of the Project | 4 |
| Leavers | 5 |
| Report | 5 |
| Findings and Analysis | 5 |
| Response Rate of Completers | 6 |
| Response Rate of Leavers | 7 |
| Placement Rate | 8 |
| Improvement of Student Satisfaction | 10 |
| Special Survey of Students with Grades of F, W, and F and W | 11 |
| Conclusions | 13 |
| Response Rate | 13 |
| Placement Rate | 13 |
| Leavers | 14 |
| Student Satisfaction | 14 |
| Benefits and Costs | 14 |
| Recommendations | 14 |


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## Abstract of the Final Report

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|---|---|
| Title of Report: | The Development and Coordination of Placement and Follow-Up for Vocational Guidance |
| Organization: | Hillsborough Community College |
| Project Director: | Nicholas J. Hirtz |
| Expenditures: | $4,660.09 |
| Duration of Project: | September 1, 1984 - August 31, 1985 |
| Project Number: | 2921525-5-2E21 |

### Problem

After the 1983 Florida Legislature tied future funding for vocational programs to redefined placement standards and set percentages of program completers who must be placed, past procedures for documenting placement had to be revised. In addition to the placement survey, other sources of placement documentation had to be utilized and additional man power devoted to process. Also, response rates on program leavers were too low to be of value in recommending program changes.

### Objectives

The objectives of this project were: 1) to increase the response rate of program completers and leavers, 2) to increase the placement rate of program completers, specifically to reach a placement rate of 60% or higher, 3) to improve student satisfaction due to more timely and personal contacts, 4) to develop detailed and functional data to be used in program modification.

### Procedures

The project used available sources of placement documentation which in the past had been neglected. The

project also provided staff assistance in contacting program completers who escaped the other available sources of placement documentation. A special survey was developed for a segment of leavers, and the results of this survey were tabulated.

## Results and Potential Utilization

The project demonstrated the response rate required to reach the placement rates necessary for future vocational program funding and the use of multiple sources of placement documentation to meet placement standards and rates. The project also addressed student satisfaction, program leavers, and a special survey of vocational students who had received grades of F, W, and F and W. The results of the project will be made available to individuals expressing interest in Florida's Vocational Research Program.

# Introduction

## History

The 1983 Florida Legislature linked future funding for vocational programs with placement standards. Vocational program completers would meet the new placement standards: 1) if employed in a field related to their training, 2) if in the military, or 3) if continuing in related postsecondary education. According to the new legislation, at first the placement rate (of all vocational program completers) was set at 60% and advanced to 70% at a later date as a condition of future funding.

## The Problem

Following the changes in the 1983 legislation on placement, it became evident that placement rates of vocational program completers would have to increase in comparison to the experience of previous years. Placement in the past was documented by surveys mailed to and returned by vocational program completers. The response rates to these surveys were considerably below the 60% placement rate required by the new legislation, and the past experience offered little prospect of documenting a 60% placement rate by a survey as the sole instrument.

Though the 1983 or subsequent legislation did not change the practice of surveying leavers (students who do not enroll for two consecutive terms) of vocational programs, leavers did not always respond at rates high enough to justify recommendations for program modifications. As a result of low response rates by completers and leavers, the need developed to design a timely and coordinated system to conduct placement and follow-up studies.

## The Project

Then Hillsborough Community College in August 1984 in response to a request for proposals from the Division of Vocational, Adult and Community Education submitted a grant proposal to seek federal vocational funds for the development and coordination of placement and follow-up. The

request for proposals also required a written three-year plan for placement and follow-up. The project grant award was approved and covered the period from September 1, 1984 to August 31, 1985.

This project addressed the need for a more timely and coordinated approach to placement and follow-up studies. A timely approach would include placement documentation as soon after program completion as feasible and in a more personal manner than has been the practice by survey. Coordination would involve available sources for placement documentation, such as the faculty and the job placement specialist, which were not utilized in the past. In addition, the project included a special study on program leavers which would have implications for student retention and program modification.

Objectives

The objectives of the project were:

1. to increase the response rate of program completers and leavers,
2. to increase the placement rate of program completers, specifically to reach a placement rate of 60% or higher,
3. to improve student satisfaction due to more timely and personal contacts,
4. to develop detailed and functional data to be used in program modifications.

## Methodology

The methodology for the placement portion of the project consisted fo six distinct steps or phases. These steps are presented in the following narrative with the assumption that some steps could occur simultaneously and others in sequential order.

Faculty

Prior to the Fall Term in 1984 (Term I/85) the project director briefed the vocational faculty and administrators

on the changes in Florida Statutes on placement and sought their cooperation in the documentation of placement. In order to expedite the process of faculty documentation of placement, the project director provided the faculty with a list of completers for each vocational program, copies of the College's placement survey questionnaire, and copies of a referral form for completers who needed assistance in job placement. The faculty from their knowledge of or contacts with completers were to fill out these forms and forward them to the project director.

Then later in the reporting year and after placement was documented from other sources, the faculty were again asked to assist by providing additional placement data on students who did not at that time meet the placement standards. This step, conducted by telephone or meetings, allowed the faculty to update their previous placement documentation without the necessity of reviewing completers who were already placed.

Job Placement Specialists

The job placement specialists on the campuses also contributed to the documentation of placement in much the same manner as faculty. Also, the faculty and the project director referred completers who needed assistance in job placement to the job placement specialists. This referral form was a new procedure at the College.

Survey

As early as September of 1984 the survey questionnaire to collect placement data required by the Division of Community Colleges (DCC) was mailed to all program completers. A second mailing of the survey later was sent to all vocational program completers who did not respond to the first mailing. Finally, a third mailing of the survey was sent to vocational program completers who did not respond to the second mailing.

Feedback Tape

The Feedback Tape from the Division of Labor and

Employment Security matches program completers with students in the state university system and employees reported (to the Division) by employers. As a consequence, the Feedback Tape, received by the College in May of 1985, provided placement information in addition to the data collected from the faculty, the job placement specialists, and the survey.

Special Activities of the Project

The project provided a Staff Assistant for Placement. With the assistance and direction of the project director the Staff Assistant collected the placement documentation received from the faculty, the job placement specialists, the survey, and the Feedback Tape. The Staff Assistant then divided the program completers into two general groups: 1) those who met placement standards, and 2) those who did not meet placement standards. Completers who at this point in time met placement standards did not require any further activity. Completers who did not meet placement standards were divided into three groups: 1) those who simply did not meet placement standards, 2) those whose documentation was contradictory, obscure, or incomplete, and 3) those who could not be contacted. This group of completers not meeting placement standards was often the most difficult to contact, and several programs would depend upon this group in order to meet the 60% placement rate.

The Staff Assistant used every reasonable means, such as available student records, the telephone directory and dialing assistance, city/county cross references, friends and relatives, public agencies, and clues from previous employers and other sources, to contact the completers who did not meet placement standards. The first effort to contact this group was by telephone. Those who could not be reached by telephone were sent (to their last known address) a special letter with the request to complete and return the placement survey. During this process the faculty were again asked to provide any additional placement data which may have come to their attention since their original documentation.

Leavers

Vocational program leavers (those former students who did not enroll for two consecutive terms) were surveyed as required by the DCC. Three separate mailings of the survey were sent to the leavers in the same manner as to completers. Assuming that these leavers would not provide additional, functional data through another survey, a distinction was made based on prospective or potential leavers. Students who received grades of F and W were judged to be potential leavers. A computer print-out was created with project funds to identify students in two major terms, the Fall Term of 1984 (Term I/85) and the Winter Term of 1985 (Term II/85), who received grades of F and W and a combination of F and W. To restrict the population to a manageable size only the students with grades of F, W, and F and W in the Fall Term of 1984 (Term I/85) who had not registered again in the two successive terms were surveyed.

The survey instrument was designed by the project director. The purpose of the survey was to determine the population's employment status, reasons for leaving the program, and steps the students may take to overcome problem areas (see Appendix A). The Staff Assistant attempted to contact the population of the survey by telephone. The population who could not be reached by telephone to complete the questionnaire were sent a questionnaire in the mail.

Report

The project director prepared a comprehensive annual report for internal use on the findings of the placement and follow-up studies. This annual report is detailed and pertains only to placement at this College, though the findings of this project are included in it.

## Findings and Analysis

The findings and analysis to follow will be based on the four objectives listed in the introduction to this report.

## Response Rate of Completers

The response rate for the 1983-84 placement of vocational program completers using all of the various sources for documentation was very high (see Table 1).

Table 1

Hillsborough Community College

Three-Year Response Rate of Vocational Program Completers

| Program | Percentage of response rate | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1981-82 | 1982-83 | 1983-84 |
| AS Degrees | 52.6 | 48.5 | 95.0 |
| Technical Certificates | 50.0 | 17.6 | 100.0 |
| Certificates of Training | - | - | 95.5 |
| All programs | 52.5 | 45.8 | 95.6 |

Note. The Certificate of Training program in 1981-82 and 1982-83 was either included under the Technical Certificate programs or not reported.

Note. Source: The AA-2A Reports for the identified years.

An overall response rate of 95.6% of all vocational program completers demonstrates the effectiveness of other sources of placement documentation in addition to the survey

alone or by itself. Though the project did not tabulate the percentages of placement attributable to each source for documentation, in terms of the number of placements a reliable estimate would place faculty documentation as the most productive source, followed by the survey, the special telephone and mail canvass by the Staff Assistant, the Feedback Tape, and the Job Placement Specialists. There is a minor problem concerning duplication of effort when using multiple sources, but the problem is worth the overall gain and could be eliminated with improved coordination or an updating of placement process by a computer program.

Though all sources of placement documentation are important, the most critical source is the final list and follow-up by the Staff Assistant because in many programs these last completers to be contacted will push given programs to or above the 60% placement rate. In other words, additional staff assistance not available in the College's operating budget was the deciding factor in a very high response rate.

A high response rate reduces the argument in previous years that the data was based on such low response rates that program modifications could not be determined from them.

Response Rate of Leavers

As Table 2 shows, the response rate of vocational program leavers for 1983-84 increased by more than 100% over the two previous years. This increase in 1983-84 was due to an earlier (in the academic year) mailing of the survey, a special appeal to the leavers for their cooperation, and a second and third mailing of the survey.

Though an overall response rate of 12.4% is not optimal, it did provide numbers in cells which in previous years were empty or had such low numbers that recommendations were impossible.

Table 2

Hillsborough Community College

Three-Year Response Rate of Vocational Program Leavers

| Program | Percentage of response rate | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1981-82 | 1982-83 | 1983-84 |
| AS Degrees | 5.5 | 5.2 | 11.8 |
| Technical Certificates | 5.3 | 9.2 | 16.0 |
| Certificates of Training | - | - | - |
| All Programs | 5.5 | 5.7 | 12.4 |

Note. Source: The AA-2L Reports for the identified years.

Placement rate

The placement rate for the reporting year (1983-84) in this project was considerably higher than for the two previous years (see Table 3).

Table 3

Hillsborough Community College

Three-Year Placement Rate for Vocational Program Completers

| Program | Percentage of completers placed | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1981-82 | 1982-83 | 1983-84 |
| AS Degrees | 43.1 | 9.2 | 87.1 |
| Technical Certificates | 46.2 | 11.8 | 95.0 |
| Certificates of Training | - | - | 74.2 |
| All Programs | 43.3 | 9.5 | 84.6 |

Note. The College in 1982-83 changed the survey instrument. Though 89.0% of the completers of AS degree programs reported in 1982-83 that they were employed, only 9.2% could be identified as employed in the field of their training, in the military, or continuing in related postsecondary education.

Note. Source: The AA-2C Reports for the various years.

As the note in Table 3 mentions, the survey instrument was changed in 1982-83 and it sought in a more complicated manner more data from the completers than in 1981-82. Yet the reporting of placement data to the state on the AA-2C did not change substantially from 1982-82 to 1982-83. The severe difference in the percentage of completers placed from 1981-82 to 1982-83 can receive no adequate explana-

tion. Further, the data on placement for 1982-83 does not take into account the revision of placement data following the changes in the legislation on placement standards and rates. After the data for 1982-83 were revised, 70.8% of the AS degree programs and 80.0% of the technical certificate programs met the placement standards at or above the 60% placement rate.

The percentage of completers placed in 1981-82 and 1982-83 depended on the survey as the sole instrument of placement documentation. The data for 1983-84 was developed using multiple sources of placement data.

Improvement of Student Satisfaction

The project did not call for quantitative measurement of improved student satisfaction due to more timely and personal contacts. There were, however, several indications that student satisfaction with the placement process was at a high level.

A more timely contact with program completers was demonstrated by beginning the placement documentation at an earlier time in the reporting year than was the practice in the past. The documentation by faculty of placement at the time students graduated or completed programs took place in only a very few programs. Placement documentation at the time of graduation or program completion was prescribed by the Three-year Plan for Placement and Follow-Up, but was suspended by the project director while changes in the 1985 legislation were clarified. There was risk in the field concerning an early documentation of placement, that is, placement at the time of graduation or even earlier, would have to be repeated when the legislation changed direction, as it did for the survey instrument to be used for 1984-85 and for the definition of continuing postsecondary education.

For the reporting year of 1983-84 the College made more personal contacts in relation to placement than in any previous year. The number of these personal contacts was not documented, but, nevertheless, personal contacts were made by faculty members, job placement specialists, the

project director, and the Staff Assistant in regard to placement and the questionnaire to students with grades of F, W, and F and W. Students definitely gave the impression that they were pleased the College was calling them. When respondents to the survey of students with grades of F, W, and F and W indicated a specific problem or question, they were called by the placement office and frequently expressed a little surprise and than gratitude for receiving a response to their concerns. The students contacted were very positive and cooperative; there was a total lack of criticism on the nature of the contact and an absence of spurious and facetious remarks. Only one completer of the 570 completers contacted refused to give the requested information. The referral to the job placement specialists of completers who wanted assistance in job placement was a new procedure and was viewed in a positive manner by the job placement specialists.

The Report

The report was prepared to meet the requirements of the project grant. Other aspects of and related to placement and follow-up were presented in an institutional report for internal use.

Special Survey of Students with Grades of F, W, and F and W

Appendix A contains a copy of the survey instrument used to collect data on vocational program students who received grades of F, W, or F and W in the Fall Term of 1984 (Term 1/85) and who did not enroll for classes in the Winter Term of 1985 (Term II/85) and the Spring Term of 1985 (Term III/85). The survey by telephone and mail was conducted for 590 students. There were 220 responses to the survey and a 37.2% response rate. The findings of the survey are given in the following narrative.

A very low percentage (6.3) of students who received grades of F, W, and F and W enroll again in the two terms after grade receipts. Students with grades of W are the most likely to re-enroll immediately. Almost two-thirds of these students indicated they would re-enroll in the future, and those students with F grades are by small margins the

most likely to re-enroll in the future.

Almost 9 of every 10 students were employed at survey time, over 8 of 10 were employed full-time when they were students, and only about 1 in 10 quit their jobs to attend classes. One of 5 students reported they got a better job because of their studies at the College. The findings on employment were almost evenly distributed according to the various grades.

Less than 20% of the students felt courses were too difficult, and students with grades of W were more likely to feel that way. Less than 10% of the students thought the courses were too easy. Two-thirds of the students felt the courses were what they expected and 80% thought the courses met their needs. Over two-thirds felt courses were accurately represented by academic advisement. There was no great difference according to grades on how students felt about courses.

Over 8 of 10 students felt the professors covered the subject matter and were not too demanding in class. Seven of 10 students thought the professors assessed class-work in such a way as to help them pass. Students with F grades were more likely to think the professors covered the subject matter than students with grades of W and grades of F and W. Students with W grades tended to think the professors were more demanding than students with F grades and grades of F and W. Students with grades of F and W were more likely to think assessment helped them than students with grades of F and grades of W.

Only just over 2 of 10 students received a mid-term assessment, though 6 of 10 thought a mid-term assessment would have helped them avoid a poor grade and over 7 in 10 felt periodic assessment would have helped them avoid academic difficulty. The various grades were fairly evenly distributed in the assessment concerns of students.

There was considerable, over 300 distinct comments, and varied student reaction to help expected from the College. Of the 300 comments, respondents commented most often (40 or 16.3%) on conflicts between employment and college

studies or classes and in equal numbers (49 or 16.3%) on the professors. In third, fourth, and fifth place in the number of comments were courses (47 or 15.7%), personal reasons (38 or 12.7%), and counseling (33 or 11.0%). The remaining comments ranged from 6.0% of the total to 0.7%.

## Conclusions

### Response Rate

There was a significant relationship between the response rate of vocational program completers and their placement rate. Though there are hazards in comparing one year to the next because of various changing conditions, the experience for two of three years demonstrated that there would be a slippage of approximately 10% between the response rate and the placement rate. In other words, in order to document a 70% placement rate a response rate of 80% from of the program completers would be necessary. Reliance on a mail survey alone would not produce a sufficient response rate to meet the newly required placement rates.

### Placement Rate

The multiple sources of placement documentation in addition to the survey and the employment of a staff assistant to contact the vocational program completers who were not accounted for by the other sources of placement documentation were the contributing factors to an 85% placement rate for all vocational program completers for 1983-84. This 85% placement rate for 1983-84 was approximately 100% above the rate based on the same standards for 1981-82, and exceeded the 60% rate required for 1983-84. The findings reinforced the fact that response rates had to be increased in order to increase placement rates and that the College needed at least additional temporary support personnel to meet the placement standards and rates required by changes in the legislation.

Leavers

The response rate of vocational program leavers, even after increased efforts to raise their rates of response to questionnaires, remains so low that any operational decisions based on the data do not have statistical relevance. The collection of data on leavers as currently required by the DCC simply has little benefit for the institution.

Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction can be improved by personal and timely contacts with them. If a study similar to this one is attempted, it could be improved by a quantitative and measurable approach and the application of statistical procedures.

Benefits and Costs

The benefits of this project were improvements in the response and placement rates which were necessary to meet state requirements on placement standards and rates, improved data upon which to base recommendations for program modification, and the development of procedural techniques which may be used in future placement and follow-up studies.

The cost of this project, not including institutional costs which contributed to the project, was $4,660.09 from an allocation of $4,821.00. The allocation was slightly above the expenditures because the materials and telephone charges did not meet anticipated costs. The benefits exceeded costs by a large margin.

## Recommendations

1. The Division of Vocational, Adult and Community Education should continue to support projects or supplement community college staff to meet legislative requirements.

2. The DCC should thoroughly revise or eliminate the studies and follow-up of program leavers.

3. Institutions should be given flexibility, subject to audit procedures which already exist, in documenting the placement of vocational program completers.

# Appendix A

Student's Name _____ Date _____

Student's Social Security Number _____ Page No. _____

Term _____

F only _____
W only _____
WNA only _____
F and W _____
F, W, and WNA _____

| | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| **I. Current Status** | | |
| 1. Are you enrolled at HCC at this time? | _____ | _____ |
| 2. Are you planning to enroll at HCC in the future? | _____ | _____ |
| **II. Employment** | | |
| 1. Are you employed at this time? | _____ | _____ |
| 2. Were your employed when you were a student at HCC? | _____ | _____ |
| a) If yes, Full-time____ Part-time ____ | | |
| 3. Did you quit a job to attend HCC? | _____ | _____ |
| a) If yes, did you return to the same job? | _____ | _____ |
| 4. Did you get a better job because of your studies at HCC? | _____ | _____ |
| **III. Courses.** | | |
| 1. I felt that the courses: | | |
| a) were too difficult for me | _____ | _____ |
| b) were too easy for me | _____ | _____ |
| c) were what I expected | _____ | _____ |
| d) met my needs | _____ | _____ |
| e) were accurately represented by academic advisement | _____ | _____ |
| **IV. Professors** | | |
| 1. I felt that the professors: | | |
| a) presented or covered the subject matter | _____ | _____ |
| b) was too demanding for me | _____ | _____ |
| c) assessed my class-work in such a way as to help me obtain a passing grade | _____ | _____ |
| **V. Assessment on class attendance and course-work** | | |
| 1. Did you receive a mid-term assessment? | _____ | _____ |
| 2. Would a mid-term assessment have helped you to avoid a poor grade? | _____ | _____ |
| 3. Would a periodic assessment have helped you avoid academic difficulty? | _____ | _____ |

**VI. Future**

1. How can HCC help you in your future educational plans?

Comment: _____